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# JEFFCO GENERATIONS

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A Learning-Centered Vision for our Community's Schools



**JEFFCO PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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A Learning-Centered Vision for our Community's Schools

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**JEFFCO PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

*Jeffco Generations 2017*





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>3</b>	Acknowledgements
<b>4</b>	Foreword
<b>6</b>	Executive Summary
<b>7</b>	Introduction
<b>8</b>	Overview
<b>9</b>	The Center: Learning
<b>11</b>	Generations Skills
<b>13</b>	Conditions for Learning
<b>15</b>	Readiness for Learning
<b>17</b>	Closing

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



I wish to first acknowledge and thank the students, community, and staff for providing me the context and inspiration for this effort. In these first 100 days as Superintendent of Jeffco Public Schools, I've crisscrossed all parts of Jeffco and had hundreds of conversations about our schools and our hopes for the future. This document reflects input from the countless thoughtful, engaged people I have had the pleasure to speak with since taking this office, and it is a testament to your aspirations for a better community and future for our children.

I wish to thank the members of the Jeffco Public Schools' cabinet, who helped guide and inform this work and supported me in understanding the school organization and community in Jeffco. In particular, I wish to thank Special Assistant to the Superintendent Tom McDermott, who provided important critical feedback and managed much of the logistics involved with making this document a reality. Special thanks also to Chief Academic Officer Matt Flores and Executive Director of Curriculum & Instruction Jef Fugita for their feedback.

I wish to thank the members of the Board of Education for their confidence in me as their new superintendent. I am inspired by your courage, your spirit of service to others, and your commitment to public education. Thank you for the opportunity to serve this wonderful community and to contribute to the great tradition that is Jeffco.

Finally, I wish to thank my family – my wife Sarah, our daughter Norah (age five), and our son Chase (age four) – who put up with a husband and father who wishes he had been home more often, and who wishes he had been more present with you when he was home over these past few months. I am sorry for all the late nights, the lost weekends, and for all the times my mind seemed elsewhere. I will make it all up to you, and I love you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason E. Glass". The signature is fluid and cursive.

*Jason E. Glass, Ed.D.  
Superintendent & Chief Learner*

## Limited Printing Note

Jeffco Public Schools is committed to being a good steward of both the environment and taxpayer resources. We have printed a limited number of this report because of its importance in conveying this vision to our community. We ask that you share and pass along any printed versions of this document to extend its reach and to also direct people to electronic versions, which can be found at [jeffcopublicschools.org/about/generations](http://jeffcopublicschools.org/about/generations).

# FOREWORD

The release of this document marks my 100th day as Superintendent for Jeffco Public Schools. I used this time to meet with hundreds of people across Jeffco – from students, to parents, to staff, and many members of the community – to hear what they like about our schools, to listen to their concerns, and to learn about their aspirations for Jeffco’s schools and children.

*A powerful strength within Jeffco became apparent in these conversations: the deep, generational ties and the web of interconnectivity that is present in our community. This is a powerful and positive force for good.*

This is not my first time joining a new organization, and I’ve learned that it is important to first take the time to understand the context and what work is already underway – and to not disrupt good things in place.

One of those good things is the **Jeffco 2020 Vision**, which was written in collaboration with several groups in the community that care deeply about our schools and our children. The spirit of the 2020 Vision is an effort to change the student learning experience in ways that make the teaching and learning experience more hands-on and skills-focused. This is indeed the most important work we can undertake, and that plan should continue to serve as a foundation for the work we are doing.

It is important to note that the Jeffco 2020 Vision was accompanied with a strategic plan whose timeline reached its conclusion at the end of 2017. As this year comes to a close, it begs us to consider where we go from here and how we build on the good work already underway.

Another positive element of Jeffco Schools that I am committed to preserving and building on is the presence of clearly defined organizational values that serve as guiding principles for the work every teacher and staff member does each day. The values that have come through so clearly in conversations with people across Jeffco include:

- **Integrity** – In Jeffco’s context, this means keeping the focus on students in the face of difficult conditions or circumstances.
- **Valuing People** – All the people connected to Jeffco Public Schools matter to us, above all else. I’ve repeatedly heard that “Jeffco is a big district, which gets really small quickly.” When times get tough, we pull together.
- **Teamwork** – Jeffco has an extraordinary level of human talent, both in our schools and in the community. We have a history of positive collaboration and supporting one another.
- **Exemplary Performance** – Jeffco has a tradition of quality and working to do right by kids and the community. I am excited to now be part of that tradition.

These organizational values run deep in the culture of Jeffco, and I will work to honor and build on them.

However, I do think we need something more. Strong winds of change have buffeted public education for some time. Some of these changes have come about through shifts and different priorities in federal or state policy. But I think the more important change impacting us is the shift in the global economy. Commerce, communication, and competition are pervasive, instantaneous, and relentless in their



# FOREWORD

pace and demands. As we must prepare our students to engage in this new world and succeed in an environment of constant change, so must our schools adapt as well.

Therefore, in this document, I am proposing a new organization value for Jeffco Public Schools to consider adding to the ones above: An **Entrepreneurial Spirit**. Like our kids and the rest of the world, Jeffco must have the courage to adapt, innovate, take calculated risks, and evolve. The future of our students, and the very existence of school organizations such as Jeffco, are going to depend on our ability to meet this new challenge.

*We must enter this new era bravely, with the courage to do what it takes to prepare Jeffco's children for their future.*



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jeffco Public Schools has deep and meaningful generational ties that crisscross our community and a tradition of quality on which to build. But Jeffco must also adapt and change to prepare our students for their future. A central element of this change will be to take on an entrepreneurial spirit, and a willingness to innovate and adapt.

The core direction contained in this document is neither new nor flashy. Simply, it calls on us to put **learning**, and more precisely, profoundly changing and customizing the student experience, at the center of all our school reform efforts.

But learning does not happen in isolation, and we must also consider how we can improve the **conditions for learning** in our schools and community. This means building the capacity of the teaching profession to engage in this complex and meaningful work, and ensuring all our students are given a chance to work with a high-expectation curriculum.

Finally, we must recognize that students come into our schools with differing levels of **readiness for learning**. Students who are in pain, hungry, scared, abused, and neglected are not learning. As a community, we must resolve that we will allow no child in our community to have these barriers stand between them and their future.

Jeffco Generations is the beginning of a conversation about where we go next when it comes to our schools. It is also a call for a community reunion, founded on the belief that those things which tie us together are more powerful and important than those which divide us, and nowhere is this truer than when it comes to the positive future we all want for Jeffco's kids.







# INTRODUCTION

The currents of public education run deep in Jeffco, and connections with our schools run both forward and backward decades – parents now send their children (the future generations) to Jeffco Public Schools, as did their parents and even grandparents.

There is a strong sense of community pride and interconnectedness in Jeffco. We love our community's natural beauty – our green mountains, our red rocks, and our table mesas. We also love our sense of neighborhood and community – our downtowns, our old towns, and our big towns with their small-town feel.

*Jeffco also loves and supports education. Our schools welcome, shelter, and educate all families and all children – and in doing so house our best hopes and dreams for a brighter future.*

Jeffco Public Schools has a tradition of quality and has served generations of families well. But, our community also knows that our schools need to change and adapt if we wish to prepare Jeffco's next generation to compete in the lightning-fast global economy.

While almost everyone acknowledges that our schools need to be different, getting agreement about what form that should take has been difficult. Ideological differences in our community have fractured our commitment to public education, damaged community support for schools, and turned many citizens off when it comes to education.

Now, we need to work to resolve these differences. This is the time to put these divisions behind us and for Jeffco to come together around a common understanding and direction for our schools. This direction must rise above partisan politics, bring together neighbors and families, and create a virtuous cycle of tremendous public support for our schools coupled with consistently excellent outcomes.

This effort takes the conversation about education to the most basic and foundational level. It asks what should be at the core, the heart, of Jeffco's educational transformation.

This effort places **learning** at the center of our efforts. More precisely, it's about profoundly changing the experiences our students have in learning to be authentic, experience-based, and engaging.

Learning content (facts) matters, but what matters more is giving students the opportunity to apply that content to real-world situations, problems, and scenarios – where they get the chance to practice skills such as communication, self-direction, civic engagement, problem-solving, and creativity.

What matters even more is creating intentional pathways through our education system which are customized to each student's strengths, aspirations, and talents – which lead them to fulfilling and meaningful lives that give each student the opportunity to do what they love and make a difference.

**This document sets out our course to realize this aspiration – a shared dream of unbridled potential that we put forth out of love for our children.**



## OVERVIEW: IT'S A SYSTEMS THING, WITH LEARNING AT THE CENTER

Public education has been deluged by any number of politically driven reform efforts over the past few decades – new academic standards, testing and school rating systems, expanded school-choice options, new evaluation systems for educators, layers of budget transparency efforts, and any number of other disconnected (and often unfunded) legislative mandates.

Almost all of these policy shifts came from a place of good intentions, and several of them yielded some important improvements for education. For example, raising standards and accountability sheds light on students we may have been overlooking. In addition, the infusion of choice and competition has led to new and innovative school models.

In spite of all of these changes and tremendous effort involved in implementing them, we have not seen the kind of dramatic and positive change in quality across our entire system that we'd hoped for. Our schools were often misdirected, confused, and overwhelmed by conflicting reforms that were never designed to work together.

Instead of continuing this chaotic approach, Jeffco Public Schools will focus our efforts on strategies which have a direct impact on changing the student learning experience. We'll work to keep the main thing the main thing – and that is the **LEARNING** and experiences of our students.

But students don't learn in isolation – the **CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING** are also important. That work happens under the direction of and in concert with skilled and professional educators and an environment of high expectations.

Finally, we all know our students come to our schools with all kinds of backgrounds, advantages, and challenges. We also know that some students come to school with different levels of **READINESS FOR LEARNING**. That's why it's critically important that we work with our communities and parents to make sure all students have the supports they need in place to engage in the learning process.





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# KEEPING THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING: LEARNING

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The core purpose of any education system is learning. More specifically, its focus should be on the experience of the student. Everything the student sees, hears, feels, reads, processes, wonders, and experiences in the course of learning form the foundation on which everything else must be built.

In school-based learning experiences, the teacher turns things over to the student at some point in the learning process to let them practice a new skill or concept. This is sometimes referred to as the student “task,” or what we ask the student to do, practice, and experience in the process of learning.

Student tasks take all kinds of forms, ranging from the relatively repetitive and simple (think worksheets) to the creative and authentic (think of students taking on a real and specific problem or project in their community).

## ***Transforming Student Task***

The heart of really transforming education is in transforming student task. If we are not profoundly changing the things our kids get to do and experience in the process of learning, we aren’t really changing anything.

Our tasks must be grounded in high expectations, but they must also give students the chance to practice vital skills and concepts beyond just acquiring facts, which are easy to come by in the age of Google. Content is important, but what is more important is what a student can do with that content in a changing world and how they use both knowledge and skills in pursuit of their individual passion.

## ***Responsive Teaching***

All our students have individual strengths, challenges, hopes, and dreams, and our mission as educators must be to tailor each student’s learning experience to match. The best performing education systems have intentional procedures and systems to monitor how students are doing and adapt the learning experience of the student based on their needs. We must work to make sure these well-established best practices are present in our schools, with clear and repeatable processes and procedures, so every student receives the individual attention they deserve.

## ***Customized Pathways***

It is sometimes said that “experience is the best teacher,” and we all know that people tend to learn best by doing and seeing things first-hand. This is why it is important that we expand experiential learning opportunities – where we get kids out into the community and businesses to expand learning opportunities.

We have a wonderful diversity of learning opportunities for students in Jeffco. Our community has successful small businesses and entrepreneurs, professional office executives, as well as major manufacturing, scientific, and technical jobs. All of these present opportunities for students to engage and gain hands-on experience leading toward their potential future profession. We must expand apprenticeship, internship, and other experiential education opportunities in partnership with businesses and our community so that students have real-world and meaningful learning experiences as part of their education.

We will expand opportunities and develop even stronger partnerships with community colleges and other institutions of higher education, where our students can earn early college credit and be more prepared for post-secondary education.



# KEEPING THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING: LEARNING

Being ready for college and a career are not mutually exclusive, and the global workforce requires people who are both highly trained and can also quickly adapt to changing conditions. For the jobs and challenges our students will need to take on when they become adults, we need prepared learners who move freely back and forth across academically focused careers and career/technical pathways.

All of this comes back to the individual student's passion, aspirations, and goals – and the question for our schools will be how we can create a customized pathway in front of our students that delivers them the great life that all our students deserve.

## **Technology to Transform Learning**

Make no mistake – the introduction of technology into learning and our schools profoundly transforms the realm of possibilities. Students are now able to identify fact-based content quickly, pull up hundreds or thousands of original source documents, interact with people across the globe on practically any topic, and create responses and interactions with the world that was just not possible in an analog and paper-based world. We must embrace this shift and support our students in fully realizing the ever-expanding capabilities of technology-enhanced learning.

But these new possibilities also bring new challenges. Our schools must support students in learning how to navigate and engage in a digital world appropriately. Understanding how technology systems work and how to manage one's digital presence are now essential aspects of a well-rounded education.

## **Embracing (the Full-Range of) Human Experience**

In today's merciless and instantaneous global economy, anything that can be automated or outsourced to a cheaper labor market will be (or it already has). For our future generations to succeed, we will need to reinforce those things that are uniquely human: aesthetic and human experiences which bring meaning, beauty, and purpose to the world. We must educate our students so that they are all able to engage with and appreciate the arts, creative design, support them in becoming life-long creators, and expand opportunities to acquire new languages.

## **Learning – Summary**

- Transforming Student Task
  - » Content Mastery
  - » Civic and Global Engagement
  - » Self-Direction & Personal Responsibility
  - » Communication
  - » Critical Thinking & Creativity
  - » Collaboration & Leading by Influence
  - » Agility & Adaptability
- Responsive Teaching
- Customized Pathways
- Technology to Transform Learning
- Expanding (the Full Range of) Human Experience
  - » Arts
  - » Music
  - » Design
  - » Language





# GENERATIONS SKILLS

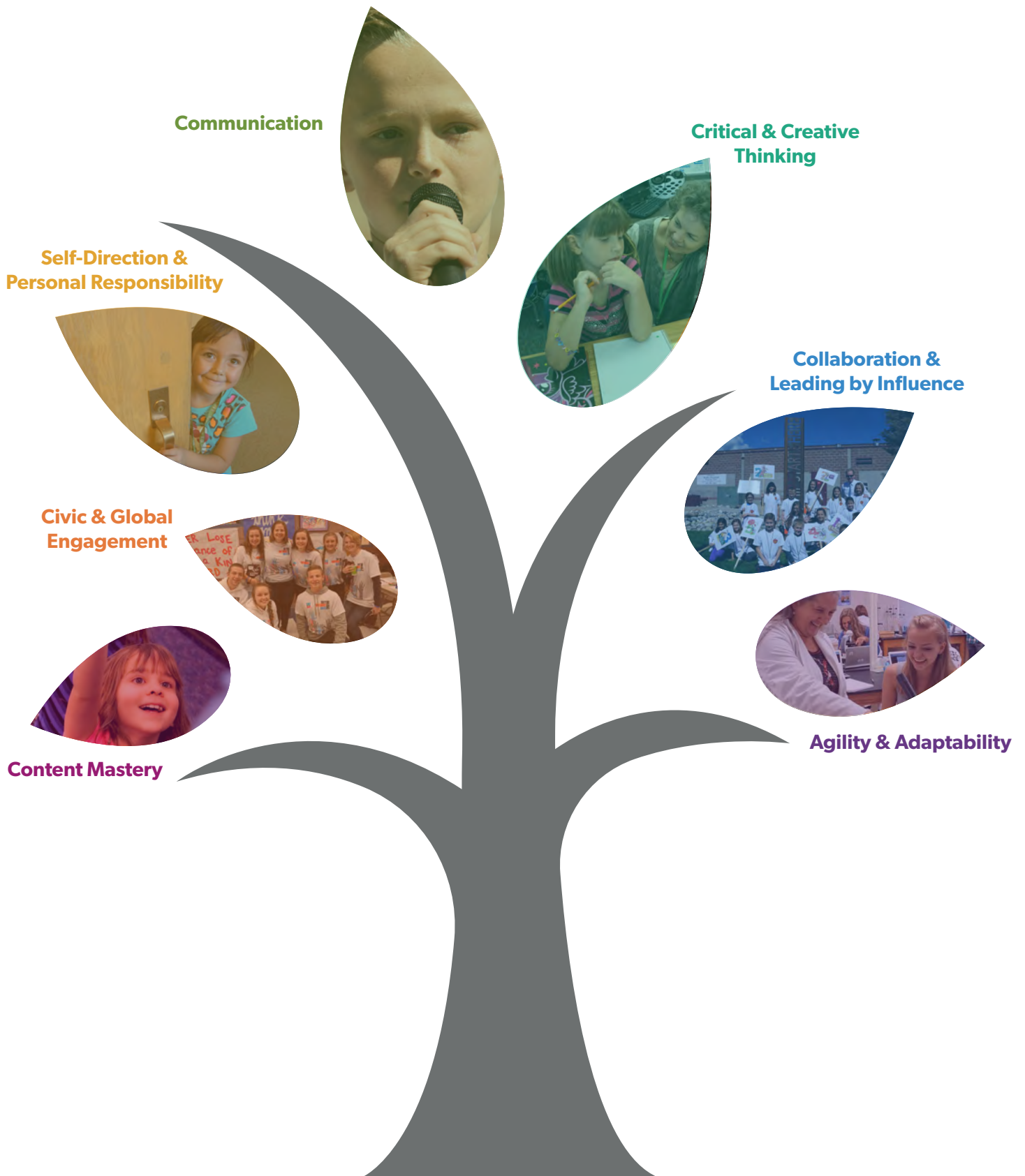
<b>Content Mastery</b>	Students understand academic concepts and are able to apply and transfer that knowledge into multiple settings. Students must also understand how to access and process changing information, updating their own thinking and processes.
<b>Civic &amp; Global Engagement</b>	Students take active roles in their communities, are prepared to be participatory citizens in our constitutional republic, and are engaged with issues of local, national, and global concern.
<b>Self-Direction &amp; Personal Responsibility</b>	Students take initiative, are inquisitive, entrepreneurial, and curious. They persevere through challenging situations, take calculated risks, and stand accountable for their actions. They continually advocate for their own needs as well as the needs of others.
<b>Communication</b>	Students learn to effectively communicate in written, digital, artistic, and oral forms. Students learn to explore and articulate their own points of view, while respectfully exploring and understanding the perspectives of others.
<b>Critical &amp; Creative Thinking</b>	Students learn to evaluate, weigh evidence, and apply reasoned decision-making to problems. Students learn to use imagination, innovation, and ingenuity to solve problems.
<b>Collaboration &amp; Leading by Influence</b>	Students learn to work together, harnessing the power of teamwork, and learn the importance of influence to motivate others to get things accomplished.
<b>Agility &amp; Adaptability</b>	Students learn to change in response to dynamic situations, environments, and complex problems. Students adjust to disruptions, ambiguity, and uncertainty in themselves, their organizations, and their communities – and thrive in spite of the obstacles.

These skills were developed through a synthesis of the work previously done with the Jeffco 2020 Vision and Tony Wagner's "Survival Skills for the 21st Century."





# GENERATIONS SKILLS





# CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

*The student learning experience must remain at the center of our work, but this alone is not enough to ensure great learning takes place. The conditions surrounding student learning are also important and serve to create an educational eco-system where quality learning – the kind that sticks – can be experienced.*

## **A Professional Model of Teaching**

The most important in-school factor contributing to student success is the teacher. The world's best-performing education systems consider teaching a profession, which not everyone can or should do. It requires a high level of personal commitment, and some might even say it is a calling. Professions are also selective, have quality pre-service training which includes practical experience, and an ongoing commitment to mastering the art and science of great teaching over a period of years or even decades.

Jeffco Public Schools commits to this professional model of teaching and in doing so also commits to treating our professionals with respect and dignity. The best instructional decisions for students happen close to the work, which is why our professional model of teaching must also empower educators to make key decisions about instructional approaches, curricular resources, and lessons.

We must empower and support our educators to take charge of their own professional learning, and continue to refine intentional systems of peer feedback, collaboration, and support.

In committing to a professional model of teaching, we must also compensate our educators as the knowledge-workers they are. People working in education are primarily interested in helping students and their community, but they also must consider financial realities like everyone else. As a system, we must commit to paying our teachers (and all our employees) a fair, livable, and reasonable wage so that we can recruit talented educators for Jeffco as well as retain the great talent we have.

## **High Expectations**


It is essential that the experiences of our students be anchored against high expectations. Our schools can accomplish that through an intentional process of alignment: alignment of learning experiences with curriculum, which is aligned with standards, which is aligned with high (and internationally benchmarked) expectations.

These high expectations must be present in all of our schools, but especially in those that serve students from disadvantaged backgrounds. To confront issues of student equity, we must ensure all of our students are afforded the right to learn in a high-expectation environment.

## **Loose/Tight Leadership**

Jeffco is a large and diverse school district with a history of school-level decision-making. We have a variety of different school models in operation – neighborhood schools, option schools, charter schools – and there is even more diversity within those categories.





# CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

We should honor and preserve Jeffco's tradition of school-level autonomy, and empower the professionals at buildings with the flexibility they need to deploy resources to meet the needs of their school. But we should also have a level of system-ness, and a common vision and direction we are working toward.

Finding the right balance of this loose/tight dynamic when it comes to decision-making will need to be an ongoing process where support for site-level decisions is coupled with a sense of system-ness and a shared vision.

## **A Commitment to Equity**

Scientific evidence supports, and any educator worth their salt can confirm, that students from disadvantaged backgrounds or who have special learning challenges require more resources, energy, and time to educate.

Equal and equitable are related terms but are different. In an educational context, equal means everyone gets the same. Equitable means that students get what they need to have a shot at success.

Jeffco Public Schools has challenges around equity when it comes to funding, facilities, and available supports – and we will never be a truly great system unless all of our students have an opportunity to realize their full potential.

## **Conditions for Learning - Summary**

- A Professional Model of Teaching
- High Expectations
- Loose/Tight Leadership
- A Commitment to Equity





# READINESS FOR LEARNING

*Any Kindergarten teacher can tell you that students show up on the first day of school with lots of differences. Students have different abilities and needs, and we have decades of education research which confirms that the biggest indicators of student success are related to out-of-school factors and the student's environment.*

*Our schools do a lot for our kids and incredible learning breakthroughs happen on a daily basis in Jeffco. But our schools can't solve all of the problems for our kids, our families, and our community alone.*

*Students who are in pain, hungry, scared, abused, and neglected are not learning. As a community, we must resolve that we will allow no child in our community to have these barriers stand between them and their future.*

## **Schools as Community Hubs**

Our public schools serve as a remarkable network of support for kids and families across Jeffco. In partnership with community organizations including other government agencies, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and the business community – we can strengthen our network and work toward creating a Jeffco where no child suffers from hunger, preventable illness, lack of dental care, or lack of mental health supports.

## **Social-Emotional Supports**

Students who are socially and emotionally healthy can focus their attention and energy on learning. Unfortunately, some students struggle with depression, live in fear, and suffer from mental health struggles and emotional challenges. We also have students who are socially isolated, have few meaningful personal connections, and who may feel uncertain or disengaged with their own futures. None of these situations is conducive to learning.

For learning to be a priority, we must support students in all these areas. Jeffco Public Schools already has a strong commitment to social-emotional supports for students and this effort must continue.

## **Expanding Early Childhood Education**

Our school district will not fully achieve its goals unless we work to simultaneously expand the quantity and quality of early childhood education in Jeffco.

Quality early childhood education is much more than just childcare. It is an academically and developmentally focused experience that provides students with early literacy and numeracy skills, as well as other academic experiences, so they come to school ready to learn.

A system of early childhood education already exists in Jeffco, but (like most places in the United States), it is a patchwork of different government organizations, nonprofits, private providers, churches, family/friends, and neighbor care.





# READINESS FOR LEARNING

All of these options are important in our community and we must support them all toward working together as a system to expand access, capacity, and quality across the board.

## **Meaningful Parent & Community Engagement**

In some of our schools, engagement is already strong – where parents and the community come together in support of learning. In these areas, relationships are strong and positive. In other areas, schools struggle with parent engagement – both in terms of rallying the community to support school needs but also in making parents full partners in their child’s education.

There is an art and science to creating real, meaningful, and genuine parent and community engagement. We must change our school practices to involve parents in decision-making and bring our community into our schools as partners.

## **Readiness for Learning – Summary**

- Schools as Community Hubs
- Social-Emotional Supports
- Expanding Early Childhood Education
- Meaningful Parent & Community Engagement





# CLOSING

Jeffco's greatest strength is the deep pride and generational connections between our communities and schools. For decades, people in Jeffco have recognized that education is essential to the community's long-term health and viability and that every one of us has a moral obligation to create a better future for our children. Our investment and involvement in our schools is a way that we connect to the future, readying future generations to build on and improve the wonderful quality of life already present in Jeffco.

This document is not intended as a definitive statement on Jeffco Public Schools' vision and direction. Rather, it is shared as a possible beginning of our next chapter. In the days ahead, I hope that this document will be a catalyst for thoughtful and energetic conversations about how to give our children a great education that prepares them for the rest of their lives.

This document works to create a vision for public education in Jeffco that is centered on learning. As a community, we must determine if that is indeed where we wish to place our focus and the approaches contained in this document are the right work.

It asks our schools and community to bring a new organizational value to Jeffco Public Schools: An Entrepreneurial Spirit. This does not mean we should launch into any number of educational leaps of faith – but it does mean that we need to start taking some calculated risks, embracing new, creative, and evidence-based models of learning, and bringing more of a start-up mind-set to our district. This spirit should imbue all aspects of our work, and compel us to consider if there are better ways to support student learning.

Jeffco Generations was developed after hundreds of hours of community listening and conversation. If this indeed represents where we can build a critical mass of consensus, then our next steps will be to flesh out a detailed strategy accompanied with a set of focused actions.

Make no mistake – the changes proposed here are deep and meaningful in scope and will take years of focused intensity to execute fully.

The vision outlined contains no quick fixes, silver-bullet approaches, or fodder for the traditional partisan political battles over education. Instead, it focuses on the most elemental component of an educational system – student learning – and asks us to create a complete support system around that learning experience.

Let us be courageous in taking these first steps – and to a reunion of our community's generations and people, born out of love for our children.

*Let us be courageous in taking these first steps – and to a reunion of our community's generations and people, born out of love for our children.*



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